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Claims

1. A method of providing a service to a client from one of a plurality of servers, each of the servers being capable of providing the service to the client and
5 each of the servers being associated with a service address common to all of the servers, the method comprising the steps of:
receiving a request for the service from the client, the request specifying the common service address;
in response to the request, connecting the client to one of the plurality of
10 servers;
receiving, at the client, information identifying each of the plurality of servers from the server to which the client is connected; and
selecting, at the client, one of the plurality of servers as the server to be used to provide the service to the client.
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2. A method according to claim 1, including the step of providing the client with information relating to the status of each of the plurality of servers.
3. A method according to claim 1 or 2, including the step of providing the
20 client with information relating to the number of users being served by each of the plurality of servers.
4. A method according to claim 3, wherein the step of selecting a server includes selecting the server in dependence on the number of users being served by
25 each of the plurality of servers.
5. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, including the step of providing the client with information relating to a grouping to which each of the plurality of servers belong.
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6. A method according to claim 5, including selecting the server in dependence on the grouping.

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7. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the step of selecting a server comprises randomly selecting a server.

8. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, including routing the client request to one of the plurality of servers using a DNS round-robin algorithm.

9. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein each of the plurality of servers holds information relating to all of the servers.

10. A method according to claim 9, including the step of communicating said information between the servers in real-time.

11. A method according to claim 9 or 10, wherein the information includes one or more of information identifying each of the servers, status information for each of the servers, information defining the number of users connected to each of the servers and grouping information for each of the servers.

12. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, further comprising requesting a connection to the selected server.

13. A method according to claim 12, including, in the event that the connection to the selected server fails, attempting to reconnect to the selected server.

14. A method according to claim 13, further comprising, in the event that the reconnection attempt fails, re-requesting the service to obtain the identifying information for servers configured to provide the service.

15. A client for use in a client-server system, comprising:
means for requesting a service, the request specifying a service address common to all of a plurality of servers, each of the plurality of servers being capable of providing the service to the client;
means operable to connect to one of the plurality of servers;

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means operable to receive information from the server to which the client is connected, said information identifying each of the plurality of servers; and

means for selecting one of the plurality of servers as the server to be used to provide the service to the client.

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16. A client according to claim 15, wherein the information identifying each of the plurality of servers further includes information relating to the status of each of the plurality of servers.

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17. A client according to claim 15 or 16, wherein the information identifying each of the plurality of servers further includes information relating to the number of users being serviced by each of the plurality of servers.

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18. A client according to claim 15, 16 or 17, wherein the information identifying each of the plurality of servers further includes information relating to a grouping to which each of the plurality of servers belongs.

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19. A client according to any one of claims 15 to 18, wherein the selecting means is arranged to randomly select one of the plurality of servers.

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20. A client according to any one of claims 15 to 19, wherein the selecting means is arranged to select one of the plurality of servers in dependence on one or more of the number of users being serviced by each of the plurality of servers, the status of each of the servers and the grouping to which each of the servers belongs.

21. A server for use in a client-server system having a plurality of servers, each of the servers being capable of providing a service to the client and each of the servers being associated with a service address common to all of the servers, the server comprising:

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means configured to receive information relating to each of the plurality of servers;

means configured to connect to the client in response to a request from the client for the service, the request specifying the common service address;

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means configured to send information to the client, the information identifying each of the plurality of servers to the client; and

means configured to connect to the client in response to a selection, at the client, of one of the plurality of servers as the server to be used to provide the
5 service to the client.

22. A server according to claim 21, comprising a Real-Time Text Protocol server.

10 23. A client-server system having a plurality of servers, each of the servers being capable of providing the service to the client and each of the servers being associated with a service address common to all of the servers, the system comprising:

15 means for communicating information between the servers so that each of the plurality of servers maintains information relating to all of the servers;

means for receiving a request for the service from the client, the request specifying the common service address;

means configured to connect the client to one of the plurality of servers in response to the request;

20 means for sending server information to the client from the server to which the client is connected, said server information identifying each of the plurality of servers to the client; and

means for selecting, at the client, one of the plurality of servers as the server to be used to provide the service to the client.

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24. A system according to claim 23, wherein the server information further includes information relating to the status of each of the plurality of servers.

25. A system according to claim 23 or 24, wherein the server information further
30 includes information relating to the number of users connected to each of the plurality of servers.

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26. A system according to any one of claims 23 to 25, wherein the servers comprise RTP servers.

27. A system according to any one of claim 23 to 26, wherein the servers are
5 operable to communicate in real-time.